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Prayers from the Inner City: Listening to the Prayer Board in Southwark
Cathedral

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Abstract

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Although there are numerous empirical studies of the practice of prayer among ordinary people, there have been far fewer empirical studies exploring the content of personal prayer and the influence of location and situation on what people pray. The ap Siôn Analytic Framework for Intercessory Prayer (apSAFIP) model was developed to enable multiple studies to be conducted within different church-related contexts with a view to addressing this issue. This study presents an analysis of 958 prayer requests posted on the prayer board of Southwark Cathedral in London, UK, using the apSAFIP model which distinguishes among prayer intention, prayer reference and prayer objective. The results are compared with other cathedral prayer studies that have employed the same analytic tool, using 'ordinary theology' as an interpretative lens.

Keywords: intercessory prayer, prayer content, prayer requests, cathedrals, ordinary theology, ordinary prayer, apSAFIP model.

INTRODUCTION

There have been numerous, largely quantitative, empirical studies concerned with mapping the practice of prayer in ordinary people's lives, which have made a significant contribution to knowledge of the practice of prayer in four important areas (ap Siôn & Francis, 2009). The first area explores 'who prays', drawing on data from social surveys (Francis, 1982; Halman, 2001), studies on behaviour, attitudes and values of religious people (Kaldor, Dixon & Powell, 1999; Woolever & Bruce, 2002), and surveys that quantify and contextualize prayer in people's lives (Poloma & Gallup, 1991; Krause & Chatters, 2005). The second area explores 'when people pray', looking at a range of contexts such as personal health and physical illness (McCaffrey, Eisenberg, Legedza *et al*, 2004), parents with ill children (De Vellis, De Vellis & Spilsburg, 1988), marital conflict (Butler, Gardner & Bird, 1998), general coping (Ellison & Taylor, 1996), finance and work-related problems (Francis, 1984), and those working in care contexts (Schneider & Kastenbaum, 1993). The third area explores the objective effects of prayer on people (Byrd, 1988; Krucoff, Crater, Gallup *et al*, 2005) or on living organisms (Loehr, 1959). The fourth area explores the subjective effects of prayer on behaviour and attitudes (Lambert, Fincham, Braithwaite *et al*, 2009),

positive self-perception (Krause, 2004), anxiety and related states (Harris, Schoneman & Carrera, 2005), resilience and coping (Brown & Nicasso, 1987), and spiritual health (Francis & Robbins, 2005). There has been less research on the content of personal prayer and the relationship between personal prayer, location and situation. Although quantifying aspects of prayer is both useful and predictive, a more detailed knowledge and understanding of prayer content can provide a better indication of which aspects of prayer are significant in particular contexts.

Studying prayer content

Studies examining prayer content fall into two main categories: studies accessing the content of prayers through surveys of people's reported experience (Janssen, de Hart & den Draak, 1990; Ladd & Spilka, 2002; Bade & Cook, 2008) and studies that access the content of prayers directly, for which there is a growing body of research literature. For example, there are analyses of the content of personal intercessory prayer requests left in church or chapel-related settings in England or Wales (Brown & Burton, 2007; Burton, 2009, 2010; ap Siôn, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012; ap Siôn & Edwards, 2012, 2013; ap Siôn & Nash, 2013; Hancocks & Lardner, 2007), the USA (Cadge & Daglian, 2008; Grossoehme, 1996; Grossoehme, Jacobson, Cotton *et al*/2011; Grossoehme, VanDyke, Jacobson *et al*, 2010), and Germany (Lee, 2009; Schmied, 2002). Qualitative data of this type has enabled relatively large, broadly-based groups to be surveyed within the contexts of church, hospital, shrine and website, where both churchgoers and non-churchgoers used open-access intercessory prayer facilities outside the contexts of formal church-related worship. Recently, this literature has been extended to include analyses of prayer requests left in cathedrals in England and Wales (ap Siôn, 2013; ap Siôn, 2015a, in press; ap Siôn, 2015b, in press).

An analytic model for personal intercessory prayer: the apSAFIP

A weakness in exploring the content of personal intercessory prayer requests is that they mainly comprise single studies, which are not replicated in multiple and diverse contexts using the same analytic tools. The one exception to this is the group of studies conducted by ap Siôn, which developed and tested an

analytic framework for intercessory prayer and applied it to a range of different church-related contexts. The ap Siôn Analytic Framework for Intercessory Prayer (apSAFIP) model differentiates between three elements intrinsic to all examples of prayer of this type: prayer intention, prayer reference and prayer objective. *Prayer intention* examines the concerns of the individual prayer authors, which are categorized within eleven areas: health and illness, death, growth (affective), work, relationships, disaster and conflict, sport, travel, housing, open intention, and general. *Prayer reference* examines the objects of prayer, and identifies four foci: the prayer authors themselves; other people personally known to the prayer author (friends and family); animals known to the prayer author (companion animals); and the world or global context. *Prayer objective* distinguishes between the effects of prayer anticipated by the prayer authors, described as primary control and secondary control. Prayer authors employing primary control are explicit about the desired outcome of the prayer request, while prayer authors employing secondary control do not suggest a desired outcome. The primary control component of prayer *objective* is further delineated between prayer authors who request material changes to the physical world and those who request affective changes.

The apSAFIP model was employed in its original form in six studies of prayer requests (ap Siôn, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2012; ap Siôn and Edwards, 2012, 2013) and in modified forms in four studies of prayer requests, where the apSAFIP was adapted to focus on particular aspects of intercessory prayer, styled as 'health and wellbeing' (ap Siôn, 2008; ap Siôn & Nash, 2013) and 'activity of God' (ap Siôn, 2011, 2013). Through conducting multiple studies in a variety of church-related contexts, it was shown that although the prayer samples shared common characteristics, location and situation had an effect on the frequency with which some characteristics were expressed.

This effect was also evident when the apSAFIP model was subsequently applied to two cathedral contexts, Bangor Cathedral and Lichfield Cathedral (ap Siôn, 2015a in press; ap Siôn, 2015b, in press. For example, when the prayer intention categories of the Bangor study were compared with the Lichfield study, results

were similar for health and illness, sport, travel, housing, work, and conflict and disaster. However, differences emerged in the death category (Bangor 13% versus Lichfield 27%), affective growth category (Bangor 14% versus Lichfield 5%), open intention (Bangor 6% versus Lichfield 19%), relationships (Bangor 8% versus Lichfield 4%), and the general category (Bangor 17% versus Lichfield 9%). When the prayer objective categories were compared there was a more equal distribution of prayers falling into the primary control and secondary control categories in Lichfield (51% and 49% respectively) than in Bangor (75% and 25% respectively). For the prayer reference categories, 86% of Lichfield prayer requests were made for other people and 5% for the prayer authors themselves, compared with 73% and 14% respectively at Bangor. There was also a slightly lower proportion of requests for the world or global category in Lichfield (8%) compared with Bangor (13%). These results suggested that Lichfield Cathedral was more associated with 'shrine' activity, with the focus on prayers for the sick and memorials for remembering for the dead, while Bangor cathedral, which is much smaller and less visited, may have more in common with a large city parish church in a largely rural area, displaying a broader range of concerns emerging mainly from the lives and concerns of the local community (ap Sion, 2015a, in press). Given this difference between cathedrals, it would be useful to increase the range of cathedrals studied in this way.

An interpretative tool for personal intercessory prayer: ordinary theology

Analytic models constructed directly from prayer content, such as the apSAFIP, need a context-relevant interpretative tool to make sense of the results and to apply them to professional and personal contexts in meaningful ways. The apSAFIP model has been devised for use in church-related contexts, which makes theology one appropriate lens through which to interpret the findings. However, the prayer samples will have been authored by lay people, many of whom would not be church attenders in any traditional sense, and the theology of the Academy and the Church is unlikely to connect closely enough with the authors and their prayer content to provide an effective interpretative tool. The construct of 'ordinary theology' may be a more appropriate lens through which to interpret the findings.

The concept of ordinary theology was developed by Astley (2002) in his book *Ordinary Theology: Looking, listening and learning in theology* because he recognised the difference and the distance between the theology of the Academy and Church and the theology of ordinary people. Ordinary in this sense refers to people who are trained in academic or ecclesial theology. Astley argued that people's ordinary theology must be taken seriously if the Church is to engage properly with its various ministry activities. He described this ordinary theology as a deeply personal, 'lived' theology which may be hesitant or inarticulate because it has not been formed by the same objective, analytical and often systematic process characteristic of academic theology. A person's ordinary theology is developed in 'experiential learning contexts' that are located outside the person (for example, their experiences of religious community) and inside the person (for example, their individual life experiences), and these two contexts for learning exist in a dialogical relationship. Therefore, in a real sense, people have their own theology, informed by their reflections on their individual experiences, and this theology is in a continual state of change and adaptation as they reflect on and incorporate new information arising from experiential learning contexts. Subsequent to this foundational work, 'ordinary theology' has been further developed and applied to a variety of theoretical and empirical contexts in an edited collection of essays (Astley & Francis, 2013).

Research agenda

The current study is linked to the 'Signs of Growth' research project, a large-scale quantitative survey of the clergy and church congregations in the Anglican diocese of Southwark in south London. Previous studies have [contributed to the body of knowledge identifying the content of ordinary people's intercessory prayers and have also](#) shown that location and situation [may have](#) an impact on results emerging from the apSAFIP model (ap Siôn, 2015a, in press, 2015b, in press). The current study examines prayers left in an inner city cathedral, [mapping prayer content and](#) exploring similarities and differences between prayer requests left in different locations and their implications for church and cathedral-related ministry using the interpretative tool of ordinary theology.

METHOD

Southwark Cathedral sits on the south bank of the River Thames at the end of London Bridge. As well as being the mother church of the Diocese of Southwark it is also a parish church with pastoral responsibilities for the 5,000 people who live in the parish. The population of the parish is mainly young and multi-racial, defined by its links to hotels, hospitals, schools, colleges, galleries, theatres, hostels for the homeless, businesses, offices and homes. People from all these sorts of places would have access to the Cathedral, alongside tourists and other visitors. Within the Cathedral, the cork prayer board was situated in the Harvard Chapel, giving people the opportunity to write prayer requests, with nearby votive-candle stands at hand. For this purpose, adhesive post-it notes of varying sizes were provided for the purpose of writing prayer requests. The present study is based on 1,000 such notes that were left posted over a ten-week period in 2013.

Analysis

The content of the prayer notes were analysed using the apSAFIP model (ap Siôn, 2015a, 2015b in press), and the results compared with two previous studies from Litchfield Cathedral (ap Siôn, 2015b, in press) and Bangor Cathedral (ap Siôn, 2015a, in press). Analysis was restricted to 916 prayer notes that were written in the English language and focused, either wholly or in part, on petitionary prayer. Excluded from the analyses were 70 other-language prayers, nine prayers for thanksgiving alone, and five prayers that were illegible. The 916 prayer notes contained 958 individual prayer requests ([identified as prayers that could have been written on different post it notes](#)), which were categorized according to prayer intention, prayer reference, and prayer objective. Prayer intention sub categories were: health and illness, death, growth, work, relationships, conflict or disaster, sport or recreation, travel, housing, open intention, and general. Prayer reference categories were: self (the prayer author), other people (friends and family known to the prayer author), animals (companion animals known to the prayer author), and the world or global context. Prayer objective categories were: primary control (PC, where

desired outcomes of the request were stated) and secondary control (SC, where no desired outcomes were stated). The primary control component of prayer objective was further delineated between prayer authors who requested material changes to the physical world (PC1) and those who requested affective changes (PC2).

RESULTS

Application of the apSAFIP

Prayer intention was most often 'open' (46%), with 'health and illness' and 'death' being the next most frequent (15% each), followed by 'general' (7%) and 'relationships' (6%), with the remaining categories appearing on less than 5% of notes. Prayer reference was overwhelmingly for 'other people' (82%), and much less often for 'self' (9%), 'world / global' (7%) or for 'animals' known to the prayer author (2%). Prayer requests mostly employed SC (65%) rather than PC objectives (35%), indicating a reluctance to request specific outcomes. Of the primary control requests, 92% were PC2 and only 8% PC1, indicating a strong preference for affective rather than material objectives.

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When the prayer intention was cross-tabulated with prayer reference, the majority of the 787 prayers for 'other people' were open intention requests (52%), followed by requests related to death (17%), health and illness (16%) and general (6%). In contrast, the 82 prayers for 'self' were mainly requests about relationships (41%), growth (18%), or work (10%). The 71 prayers for 'world or global' were related to disasters and conflicts (27%), to health and illness (25%), to growth (11%) or were general (11%). Prayers for 'animals' all focused on open intention.

When the prayer intention was cross-tabulated with prayer objective differences in emphases were also apparent. For example, around three quarters of the prayer requests relating to illness, general, relationships, growth, work, disaster or conflict, travel, and housing were PC rather than SC requests, while the

majority of requests relating to death (62%) and all of the open intention requests (comprising almost half of the total number of requests) were SC rather than PC requests. In addition, almost all the PC1 requests (89%) related to the 'health and illness' intention category.

Detailed analysis of the content of prayer intention

Open intention

Prayers left as 'open intention' were found in 438 (46%) requests, accounting for almost half of all requests posted on the prayer board during this period. None of these prayer requests included a specific intention but explicitly identified individuals or groups who were the subjects of prayer. Due to the 'open', non-specific nature of these requests, they were all 'secondary control'. Multiple requests for the same people or animals were also found in this category.

Almost all of the requests were categorized as prayers for 'other people' known to the prayer author (although some may have been for the prayer authors themselves, using the third person). The requests for 'other people' were presented in various ways, with some requests identifying a named person or persons (sometimes the relationship to the prayer author was also given) and other requests grouping people together as "family", "friends", and "enemies". A number of the prayer requests made a short statement, sometimes addressed to an individual directly, and there were many examples of requests containing an affective element, such as "with love".

All the prayers for animals were located in the 'open intention' category. The majority of the 18 requests were for named companion animals included at the end of a list of named people (these were multiple requests made by the same prayer author/s). The remaining requests usually referred to the animal by its 'personal' name and type as well as including an affective or qualitative element such as "beloved" or "best".

The four requests that had a world or global focus asked for prayer "For everyone" and more broadly "For the world" or "For all and everything beneath the sky". One request touched on a recurrent theme in the prayers collected over

this period, which was related to Spain and presented as “Spanish lost generation”.

Health and illness

Prayers concerned with ‘health and illness’ were found in 148 (15%) requests, and around 80% of these were for people known to the prayer author. These were mainly PC1 or SC requests, although almost all of the PC1 requests were found within ‘health and illness’ (25 requests).

Prayers for people known to the prayer author included a wide range of requests for relatives or friends with named or general physical health issues such as cancer, arthritis, diabetes, allergies, HIV, problems resulting from childbirth, ill babies and children, conceiving a child and operations. A number asked for healing in relation to these or for healing more generally. Some of the requests included petitions for affective qualities and gifts such as peace, strength and happiness. There were also some examples of multiple requests by the same prayer author, some of which contained extensive lists of various conditions. A small group of requests were concerned with mental health issues and other non-physical conditions, such as depression, “mental troubles”, Obsessive Compulsive Disorders, stress, drug addiction, and autism. Another group of requests were more general and linked together requests for “health” with other attributes like “wealth” and “happiness”, for example. A few requests were directed to the ill person themselves, including wishes to “Get well soon”.

Prayers for ‘world or global’ concerns covered a wide range of areas including multiple prayer requests left by the same prayer authors for cancer, HIV / AIDS, and all suffering in “mind, body and spirit”. Along with the liturgical references to “mind, body and spirit”, one other prayer request used explicitly Christian language and religious concepts for a husband to be sober “if it be thy will”. Other groups identified by the prayer authors were “all blind people” and staff at a local hospital for their safekeeping. The remaining prayers were more generic, embracing all who were “ill” or for better lives for “the poor and sick”.

Prayers for the prayer authors themselves ('self') were almost all for specific health conditions as well as one for conceiving a child. Only one prayer request employed religious language, asking for the success of a particular treatment "in Jesus' name". The remaining request was for personal "health" and family health because the prayer author did not "want to be alone".

Death

Prayers concerned with death were found in 139 (15%) requests. Almost all of these prayers apart from two (in the world or global category) were prayers for people known to the prayer author. Around 64% of the petitions were SC requests and the remaining petitions were PC2 requests.

Many of the prayers included names (or the nature of the relationship) of family and friends of prayer authors who were the deceased recipients of prayer. Sometimes dates were also recorded, either specifically or more generally, ranging from the very recent to many decades. Some requests marked anniversaries of death or another special date. Occasionally information was provided about the circumstances of death such as a car accident or HIV or more generally 'too soon'.

Prayer requests often demonstrated that their authors believed previous earthly relationships were maintained among the dead and between the living and the dead. Therefore, there was a widespread belief that death was in some sense continuous with life, and the separation between the living and the dead was in some sense a permeable reality. The latter is perhaps most clearly exemplified through the many instances of direct communication with the dead, which were often accompanied by a message letting the deceased know that they were still remembered and thought about, loved, and missed. On occasions they were also thanked and wished a happy birthday or happy Easter. In addition, there was the belief that those who had died could either make contact with, or were watching, those still living. Occasionally, prayer authors asked God to pass on a communication to dead loved ones on their behalf.

Other interesting features included: the idea that one's earthly life was concerned with doing a "job" until the point of death, which would then be followed by "peace"; what appears to be the reason given for praying for a person's deceased mother, who was not religious but was born nearby on a specified date; and the rare allusion to liturgical text such as "May her dead soul rest in peace and rise in glory".

The two requests that were global in reference were marked by the expansive range of their prayers for the dead; for one, this was for all who have "passed over" everywhere, and for the other, this was for all who had suffered especially among those who had "passed away". The all-encompassing nature of the prayers placed no restriction on the beneficiaries of prayer, which may point to an underpinning belief that all who have died (regardless of their actions or beliefs during life) could and should benefit from prayer after their deaths.

General

Prayers concerned with 'general' areas were found in 69 (7%) requests. Most of these were for people known to the prayer authors and were PC2 requests. Within general petitions for others, there was a focus on affective qualities and gifts, requests for help or for problems to be resolved (neither specified nor expressed in concrete ways), and occasionally statements directed to specific people. The affective qualities and gifts included references to safe keeping, taking care of, looking after, strength, peace, love, happiness, grace, God's presence, good life, good things, and blessing among others. "Bless" or "blessing" was a frequently used term in many requests.

There were a few prayers asking for success or making wish statements, which were too imprecise to place in any other intention category, such as "For all success that she deserves NAME x" and "I hope that NAME has the best life ever because he is the best in the world", respectively.

A few prayers for other people used explicit religious appellations and imagery, for example, “Lord happy to be in this sacred place. Thank u Father for all the [?] and always keep the family under your mantel. NAME”. The single PC1 request made reference to unspecified miracles and wonders: “For his divine mercy and blessing, miracles and wonders upon my household. For divine thanksgiving in my house this year. NAME. [PC1]”

The prayers for the prayer authors themselves were written mainly by one author and asked for all the author’s problems to be resolved. These prayers were placed in the ‘self’ category because a collection of prayers in the ‘death’ category revealed the same author’s identity. The remaining couple of prayers for ‘self’ moved from prayer author to global in the request, “Please make my and everybody’s life happy and contended and help those less fortunate people Amen” and the enigmatic, “Lord, give me a gift, you know what I want”.

The ‘general’ requests, which were ‘world or global’, were concerned with all-encompassing affective gifts as reflected in the prayers, “for all Humanity and may you bless them all with true love”, “happiness to all”, “Peace be with you”, and “Love light blessings xx”. Another request was not specific enough to place in the ‘conflict/disaster’ category, asking for God’s blessing on all those in need or distress, and there was also a more specific but also enigmatic request for a “Happy St Patrick’s Day” with the words “Breath – Fear not”.

The single PC1 request was for good weather, “Please pray for a good warm day”.

Relationships

Prayers concerned with relationships were found in 54 (6%) requests. Over half of these requests were offered for the prayer authors themselves, making this the most popular theme for this group. Around half as many requests were for people known to the prayer author and only four requests reflected a world or global interest. Around two-thirds of the petitions were PC2 requests and the rest were SC requests.

Of the 34 prayers for self, 21 were written by a couple asking for prayers for themselves and either “love” or “love and health”. Other prayers were concerned with establishing a relationship, maintaining or deepening a relationship, or restoring or reconciling a relationship. One prayer was offered for a forthcoming wedding. A small group of prayers focused on ‘parents’ such as petitions relating to an adoption and help being “good” parents. One prayer introduced the theme of relationships in the wider context of neighbours: “I’m facing violent resistance from neighbours. Please plead with the Lord for HIS intervention. NAME.” [PC2]

Prayers for other people were largely concerned with maintaining relationships or improving relationships. Some of these prayers were also used to communicate directly with named people, which may be viewed as a way of maintaining certain relationships. One prayer was offered for a forthcoming wedding: “bring NAME and NAME happily back together at home so they can live happily and Get married like they wish to.” [PC2] Restoring or reconciling relationships appeared again as a characteristic of this group of requests as well as issues surrounding parents and foster care.

The few requests for world or global relationships were for very different concerns. A particularly interesting feature of one request was the allusion to “earthly and spiritual” families, which intimates a belief in the continuation (in some form) of the family relationship structure after death: “Pray for all families everywhere – both earthly and spiritual, especially troubled ones.” [SC]

Growth

Prayers concerned with growth were found in 42 (4%) requests. Around three-quarters of these were PC2 requests, with the remaining being SC requests. There were slightly more requests for growth for other people than for the prayer authors themselves, but proportionally within the ‘self’ category, prayers for growth were considerably more numerous. There was also a smaller collection of eight prayers related to growth in the ‘world or global’ category.

Requests for other people focused on family and friends, and were mainly related explicitly to religious or spiritual growth. A particular feature recurring

in a number of these requests was an underlying awareness of God's will or "plan", which required discernment and a decision about whether to accept this or not. There was also one prayer about the reconciliation of a family member with God before death, which was placed within the 'growth' category rather than the 'death' category because of the clear spiritual growth element: "For my family and friends and all the people of the world, that they may accept and rejoice in the path set out for them. "[PC2]

Another group of requests was not clearly linked to an underlying awareness of "God's will" or "plan" because they simply asked for "guidance" and "help finding their way" in unspecified ways or asked for help in right decision-making. There was also an awareness in a number of prayers of the existence of polarities relating to light versus darkness and good versus evil, which were seen in prayers asking for guidance "in the light" and also for protection from "evil and darkness". One of these prayers appeared in proclamation form: "NAME in PLACE. there is no dark corner in the house of god. your way will be guided by friends + family NAME." [SC]

Other prayers related to the care of a church or a church community and for someone being confirmed on a specified date. A few prayers focused on the development of a particular character attribute such as the requests for specified people "needing to know that they are loved" or for God to show someone the way to love so that they are "not scared of loving and receiving" and the request for a named person "to be brave".

The requests for the prayer authors themselves were mainly related explicitly to religious or spiritual growth. Some prayers were concerned with spiritual discernment, while others affirmed the authors' commitment to their lifelong service to Christ or prayed for the need for a renewal of their faith. A number of prayer requests written by the same prayer author were concerned with vocation within the Catholic Church, displaying a commitment to service and wish to become a Cardinal. Other prayers focused on character development issues, displaying recognition of the complexity of these. One prayer request was

of particular interest because it made connections between a person's civil life and worthiness to God within the contexts of both their home country as well as the United Kingdom: "O lord, forgive all my sins Give me a peaceful life that is worthy of you. Establish me O Lord both in my Country and United Kingdom. Father Lord give us fruits of the womb. Father Lord grant NAME a peaceful and fulfilled life." [PC2]

Around half the requests for world or global issues had an ecumenical dimension relating to the Roman Catholic Church or the Orthodox Church. (This dimension was also present in prayers for self and the request to become a Cardinal.) In addition to a prayer for a list of priests, sisters and brothers, examples included: "Lord, please make Anglicans come back to the Holy Mother Church." [PC2]; "Please pray for the Pope, give his wealth to unfortunate people." [PC2]; "NAME and all Orthodox Christians on this Easter Day." [SC]

Work

Prayers concerned with work were found in 32 (3%) requests. Two-thirds of the requests were concerned with work-related issues to do with other people. These included school and college activities, both in terms of passing specific exams as well as more general success at school and college. Employment matters were also prominent such as: finding a job; being successful, financially independent or wealthy; having a new contract or good book sales (repeated connected prayers were posted in relation to this); and returning to work. In one of these cases finding employment was also linked to making an important decision in a court case and "following Christ". Three-quarters of the requests for other people and work were PC2 requests, while the rest were SC.

The prayer requests focusing on the prayer authors themselves concentrated on similar areas but were all PC2 requests apart from one. Therefore, we find references to "less stress and exam success", "finding a job", "to get successful in my work", "finding a job where I can serve him best", and "help ... with the situation at work". As found in the prayers relating to other people, repeated prayers were offered by a prayer author over this period for a specific issue, in

this case the successful completion of a MA project. In addition, 'blessing' (which appeared prominently in other prayer intention categories) appeared here in connection with success in the work context.

The remaining four requests concerned with work were for 'world or global' issues, and were all SC requests apart from one. The former related to "the formation of the Centre of Silence" in London, the staff at the "Southwark Pensioners' Centre", and "the Spanish unemployed people", while the latter linked together health, happiness, wealth, and a good job.

Disaster or conflict

Prayers concerned with disaster or conflict were found in 20 (2%) requests. All of the requests, apart from one, were related to world or global concerns. These were directed towards specific current events or disasters (such as the Boston shootings, financial crises in Cyprus, war and unrest in South Korea, Syria, and Afghanistan) or towards more general world issues (such as poverty, injustice, greed and selfishness, the young and vulnerable) and the need for new ways of living (such as peace, mercy and understanding). The primary control requests were all affective in nature (PC2) while the secondary control requests stated the area of concern but did not indicate a desired outcome. The only request not located in the world or global category was for a named person who had experienced a house fire to have as much help as possible.

Travel

Prayers concerned with travel were found in 8 (1%) requests. Four of these requests were for travel relating to the prayer authors themselves, in terms of safe return journeys home after a possible holiday, returning to a home country to work, or for personal safety in this country, described as "abroad". Other requests included help finding transport for a named person, a global prayer for travel and a prayer for those who have no choice but to leave their home countries and emigrate.

Comparison of cathedrals studies

The most striking difference in the Southwark Cathedral results compared with Lichfield or Bangor was the very high percentage of prayer requests that fell into the 'open intention' category. In Southwark, 46% of requests were open intention, compared to only 6% in Bangor and 19% in Lichfield. This meant that Southwark Cathedral also had a higher number of SC prayers category because by their nature, all open intention prayers are also SC prayers. Thus in Southwark, 65% of requests were SC, compared to only 25% in Bangor Cathedral and 49% in Lichfield.

While the effect of the large 'open intention' category influenced the percentages of prayers in the other prayer intention categories, some comment may be made about the overall prevalence of particular intention categories in relation to the other two cathedral studies. Prayers related to health and illness or death were the most frequent after the open intention prayers in Southwark Cathedral, and this prevalence was also true in Bangor. Likewise, prayers for sport or recreation, travel, housing and work appeared least frequently among the intention categories for all three cathedral studies.

In relation to prayer objective most of the PC prayers were PC2 (92%), which was similar to Lichfield (96%). Type of primary control was not differentiated in the Bangor Cathedral study. In relation to prayer reference Southwark and Lichfield were similar and different from Bangor.

Distinctive features of Southwark prayers

Distinctive features present in the prayer requests from the current study when compared with the prayer requests from Bangor Cathedral and Lichfield Cathedral were related to authorship of prayer requests, prayer content, and language.

Prayers by the same prayer author

On prayer boards it is not uncommon to have the same prayer author writing multiple or repeated prayer requests. This has been found in particular locations

such as a children's hospital chapel (ap Siôn & Nash, 2013), which given the nature of the location may be expected, and this characteristic was also present to a lesser extent on other prayer request boards in churches and cathedrals. However, the current study is distinctive in this respect because individual prayer authors offered repeated prayers that were identical or almost identical to one another. For example, "For NAME and NAME and love" accounted for 15 prayer requests, with minor variations on the theme in a further six prayer requests. There were 17 prayer requests for the same people and a named animal that followed exactly the same format. Twelve prayer requests asked for "all problems to be solved" for a named person or for all the friends and relatives of that named person who had died. There were five very similar prayers in terms of content and structure relating to a MA-level film project.

Therefore, it may be seen that during this period there were a clearly discernible group of regular 'returners' to Southwark Cathedral, posting repeated prayers on the prayer board.

Prayer communicating directly with the dead

A number of prayer request studies employing the apSAFIP model have identified the prevalence of prayers communicating directly with people who have died. For example, in Lichfield Cathedral (ap Siôn, 2015b, in press) 34% of prayers in the 'death' prayer intention category communicated directly with the dead, and in Bangor Cathedral this figure was 31% (ap Siôn, 2015a, in press). In the Southwark Cathedral 41% of payers in the 'death' prayer intention category communicated directly with the dead.

Prayer and material wealth

In Lichfield and Bangor there were numerous prayers requesting happiness, success, long life and health, but only one asking explicitly for material wealth and prosperity (a Lichfield prayer asking to win the lottery). In Southwark, however, there were four examples of such requests for material wealth with only one case where there was an attempt to 'spiritualise' the request: "Please say a prayer to NAME who wants to win the lottery. He will do good with it".

Other examples cite names of a Far Eastern origin and relate to whole families: “NAME + family – wealth + prosperity” and “For Health, wealth & Happiness ADDRESS NAMES & Families”.

Other language prayers

A distinctive feature of the prayer requests in the current study was the high proportion of prayers written in a language other than English (7%) compared with 1% for the Lichfield Cathedral study and 2% for the Bangor Cathedral study, recognising Welsh and English as first languages in the latter.

CONCLUSION

A number of conclusions may be drawn when viewed through the interpretative lens of ‘ordinary theology’. First, observing the style and language used in the prayer requests posted in Southwark Cathedral, it may be concluded that although some prayers were articulated through explicitly religious language and imagery, this was not the case for the vast majority of prayers, which were presented in ordinary, everyday language. This characteristic was also evident in the analyses from the Bangor Cathedral study and the Lichfield Cathedral study. Those who access the personal intercessory prayer facilities in cathedrals seem largely to be drawn from those who do not regularly attend worship, indicating that the prayer boards are responding a desire among the local area population to offer prayer, but to have a Christian community doing this on their behalf. [This is consistent with Grace Davie’s \(2008\) notion of vicarious religion.](#) Therefore, the provision of intercessory prayer facilities in cathedrals is a small but very significant part of a cathedral’s ministry to those living and working within its vicinity as well as others who are just passing through, many of whom would not attend formal Christian religious services and events.

Second, all the cathedrals had many requests for health and illness and death but fewer requests for sport or recreation, housing, travel and work. All the cathedrals also appeared to have significantly more requests for other people rather than those related [to](#) self, the world or global or animals. In addition,

where PC was employed in the Southwark and Lichfield, this was almost always PC2, requesting affective changes rather than material changes to the physical world. The high proportion of 'open intention' requests present in Southwark Cathedral may have been a purely practical issue as the materials provided for the writing of the prayer requests (small post-it notes) did not encourage or allow space for long requests, which made it easier to write brief prayers with an 'open intention'. Other prayer request studies have noted that there is some evidence to show interaction among the prayer authors through the material posted on the prayer board, and this may mean in the Southwark case that many prayer authors were following a similar pattern of presentation. From an 'ordinary theology' perspective (what may be gleaned from the prayers) and also from a prayer author perspective (what opportunity is given for people to formulate and express their prayers), it would be helpful to provide larger pieces of paper for the composition of prayer requests. Of the three cathedral studies, Bangor Cathedral prayer board provided the most space for the writing of prayer requests and was the least directive in terms of information included to direct the prayer author. It would be interesting to experiment with basic materials at Southwark Cathedral and record any changes to the prayer.

Third, it has already been suggested that prayers from Bangor and Lichfield reflect the differing socio-religious contexts of each cathedral. It was more difficult, however, to interpret the results of the Southwark Cathedral prayers because of the large proportion of 'open intention' requests. Nonetheless, there was evidence of many different populations accessing the prayer boards reflecting greater linguistic, cultural and ecumenical diversity than at the other two cathedrals.

Fourth, the Southwark prayer requests displayed clearly the practice of prayer authors returning repeatedly to offer the same prayers, or very similar prayers, concerned with the same theme within a short space of time. This kind of activity raises important questions about the significance of such sacred space and devotional practice for the prayer authors. It is argued that many of those visiting the cathedral prayer boards are not part of the 'churchgoing' population,

but rather they comprise the 'hidden congregation' who have a real sense of belonging to the cathedral in terms of location or place. As such, the 'hidden congregation' of individuals who visit the cathedral to use the prayer board may be a distinctive example of belonging through 'place' within Walker's (2006, 2009, 2010) categories of different forms of church/Christian 'belonging'.

Fifth. Two particular areas within the Southwark Cathedral prayer requests would benefit from further exploration from an 'ordinary theology' perspective. First, although many of the prayer requests did not use explicitly religious language, the activity of 'blessing' (either requesting blessing or offering blessing) was used frequently in many prayers otherwise employing very ordinary, everyday language. 'Blessing' would appear to be a religious practice that still resonates with many people today and is something that ordinary people may seek from the Church, although exactly how this is understood requires further investigation. Second, as with Bangor Cathedral and Lichfield Cathedral prayer studies (although with greater frequency in the Southwark prayers) beliefs about life after death would also benefit from further investigation. Analyses have consistently pointed to underlying presuppositions in this area, and a small but significant number of prayers are used solely to communicate with the dead. It would be useful to employ other research methods to probe these beliefs and expectations in more depth.

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Table 1: Content of intercessory and supplicatory prayer by intention, reference, and objective (Southwark Cathedral)

		Reference:	Other people			Global			Self			Animals			Total		
			787			71			82			18			958		
Intention:		Objective:	PC1	PC2	SC	PC1	PC2	SC	PC1	PC2	SC	PC1	PC2	SC	PC1	PC2	SC
Open intention	438		0	0	412	0	0	4	0	0	4	0	0	18	0	0	438
Health/illness	148		21	71	31	0	8	10	4	3	0	0	0	0	25	82	41
Death	139		0	50	87	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	89
General	69		1	41	9	1	7	0	0	9	1	0	0	0	2	57	10
Relationships	54		0	11	5	0	1	3	0	24	10	0	0	0	0	36	18
Growth	42		0	14	5	0	6	2	0	12	3	0	0	0	0	32	10
Work	32		0	15	5	0	1	3	0	7	1	0	0	0	0	23	9
Disaster/conflict	20		0	1	0	0	13	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	6
Housing	4		0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1
Sport	4		0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Travel	8		0	1	1	0	1	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	6	2
Total	958		22	208	557	2	37	32	4	59	19	0	0	18	28	304	626

Note. PC1 = Primary Control 1; PC2 = Primary Control 2 ; SC = Secondary Control.